

and sawmill operations that produce crossties—which depend for their livelihood on railroads having the financial resources to undertake infrastructure maintenance and improvements. If the railroads do not have the resources for that investment, these small businesses—as well as rail shippers and employees—will suffer.

This financial strength has not always been there. Indeed, the rail industry has undergone a remarkable resurgence from the late 1970s, when much of the industry was in bankruptcy and facing nationalization. The foundation of this resurgence has been the statutory changes made under the Staggers Rail Act of 1980. This bipartisan legislation lifted much of the regulatory burden that was stifling the industry, and permitted the railroads to compete in the marketplace for business, make contracts with customers, and use differential pricing to support the enormous capital investment they require for safe, efficient operations. These are basic activities engaged in by businesses across the nation, activities which had been denied the railroads for nearly a century.

The results have been little short of amazing. A moribund industry has come back to life, investing \$225 billion in its infrastructure, and providing good jobs to a quarter of a million employees. And, while the industry has had capacity constraints and other difficulties in some areas in providing the high level of service customers deserve, I believe the industry is committed to making needed investments and working with its customers to do better.

Despite the rail industry's gains, there are current efforts to turn back the clock and reimpose some of the destructive regulatory interventions which in the past hindered the railroads' ability to operate efficiently and price their services competitively. If we do so, we will be heading right back from where we have come: inefficient, poorly-performing railroads that were not dependable carriers of goods. We cannot afford that, if our nation's businesses are to grow and remain globally competitive.

Reauthorizing the Surface Transportation Board (STB), which administers the statute regulating the industry, is an important goal of the Senate Commerce Committee, and it is an objective that I endorse. Only by having a stable regulatory agency in place, can we ensure the continued application of the law in a balanced manner that takes into account the need to enable the railroads to earn enough to maintain their infrastructure, while ensuring fair rates for shippers. Indeed, the railroads are one of the most capital intensive industries in our nation, and despite their increased viability, they still fall short of the capital necessary to sustain and improve their plant and equipment. I support the current eco-

nomics regulatory regime that has served the nation well by sparking this rail rebirth. At the same time, I intend to carefully evaluate issues brought to the Committee's attention by rail labor organizations as this review goes forward.

We must ensure that our railroads can operate in ways that allow them to maximize their growth and earn a sufficient rate of return. Our shippers and the businesses that supply the rail industry need dependable, economically sound carriers to transport their goods and to buy their products. Rail employees need a safe, fair and efficient system in which to work. These are mutually interdependent objectives, and I look forward to working with my colleagues to achieve sound policy determinations that satisfy these objectives.●

AMERICAN LUNG ASSOCIATION HEALTH ADVOCATES OF THE YEAR

● Mr. ABRAHAM. Mr. President, I rise today to congratulate Dr. Samuel R. Dismond Jr. and HealthPlus of Michigan for their strong commitment to health, education and the well-being of the Genesee Valley area.

Dr. Dismond is the current chief of staff at Hurley Medical Center. Throughout his distinguished medical career, he has served on a number of influential boards. Dr. Dismond has also been recognized numerous times for his contributions to the medical profession. By supporting his community and actively promoting research in health related fields, Dr. Dismond has made a difference in a number of patient's and associate's lives.

HealthPlus of Michigan has worked tirelessly to promote lung health within their organization and their community, including efforts to help any willing employee or patient quit smoking. This was accomplished by offering various smoking cessation and behavioral support programs. However, the biggest step HealthPlus has taken was instituting guidelines requiring every physician affiliated with HealthPlus to inquire about his or her patient's smoking status during each visit and to track it within their permanent medical records. Also, the physician must encourage every smoker to attempt to stop smoking. HealthPlus has also donated money to the American Lung Association so that they might help to teach area children about asthma.

It is with great pleasure that I announce to the U.S. Senate Dr. Samuel R. Dismond as the recipient of this year's American Lung Association "1998 Individual Health Advocate of the Year" and HealthPlus as the "1998 Corporate Health Advocate of the Year." These awards will be presented at the 16th annual Health Advocate of the

Year Awards Dinner on March 18, 1999 in Grand Blanc, Michigan. I extend my sincerest congratulations to Dr. Dismond and HealthPlus of Michigan.●

THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

● Mr. ROCKEFELLER. This week marks the 10th anniversary of the Department of Veterans Affairs, which elevated the Veterans Administration (previously an independent federal agency) to cabinet-level status. This move capped the gradual evolution of a governmental response to the needs of veterans—beginning with the Plymouth colony's first pension law in 1636, and proceeding through a variety of federal bureaus with shared responsibility for ministering to veterans, before those agencies were unified into one.

The creation of the Department of Veterans Affairs has both a real and a symbolic meaning. By raising the agency to cabinet level, the Nation's chief veterans' advocate—the Secretary of Veterans Affairs—was literally given a seat at the table with all other major executive agencies, and direct access to the President. Symbolically, veterans were accorded "a voice at the highest level of government," in the words of former VA Secretary Jesse Brown. This is as it should be for the second largest agency of the federal government, whose sole mission is to serve those whose sacrifices are the very backbone of the freedoms we all enjoy.

As current VA Secretary Togo D. West, Jr., has said, "Cabinet status has brought many benefits; but it has also brought increased obligations." The VA plays a major role nationally in the fields of health care, education, insurance, and housing. As the Nation's budget is divided up, it is important that VA be on a level playing field with other federal departments to effectively safeguard our veterans' interests.

I want to take this opportunity to salute the many talented, caring, and dedicated employees of the Department who are at the heart of its operations. I know they labor under a heavy workload, particularly in this era of tightening budgets. We must ensure they have the resources they need to carry out their mission.

The Department's 10th anniversary marks a happy milestone, a decade of growth and accomplishments. My warmest congratulations to all who share in this achievement.●

GREAT LAKES CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL TRIBUTE

● Mr. ABRAHAM. Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute to the Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival, a dynamic organization which has made an